

**Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley
Chairman, Senate Special Committee on Aging
for forum on
Preparing for the Baby Boomers Retirement:
The Role of Employment
July 25, 1997 at 9:30 a.m.**

I am glad to be here today to welcome you to this important forum on older workers. I was called the "bearer" of bad news in the Washington Times this week because of the subject matter of this forum. But in my defense, this is not a new issue. As a member of the House Select Committee on Aging in the 1970s, we started talking about the tremendous loss of human capital as people began leaving the workforce at younger and younger ages.

Since my election to the Senate in 1980, I have been a continuous member of the Aging Committee. As many of you know, I just became Chairman in January of this year. I'll have to admit when I first came to Washington I did not think too much of the seniority system. But the longer I'm here ... the more I like it.

Now, as chairman of Senate Special Committee on Aging, I want to raise the profile of this issue -- as part of our bigger agenda to begin talking about how we are going to confront the challenges of the retirement of the baby boom generation.

We aren't talking about forcing people to work longer -- if they have saved and can afford to retire -- great. But there are some transformations taking place that will make it harder for people to retire at the same age as people today. Many people are not planning for their retirement. A recent survey showed that 66 percent of people had no idea how much money they needed to save for their retirement. And, people need to consider the uncertain future of public retirement programs.

In 1983, we changed the eligibility age for retirement benefits from Social Security. The retirement age for Social Security will increase from 65 for people born in 1938 and after and end up at 67 for people born in 1960 and later. People who take early retirement at age 62 will receive less benefits. That is current law.

One way to ensure that their standard of living does not diminish as they grow older is to stay in the workforce longer. Our first panel has two objectives: First, to review what the employment picture could look like for baby boomers in the 21st century. And, second, to highlight the barriers which may prevent people who want to work longer from doing just that.

Some people will either need or want to keep working longer. The second panel will propose some policy changes that could help people who find that working is a good option for them.

I want to recognize the contribution of one of my Aging Committee staff, Jean-Phillipe Viriot - Durandal. Jean-Phillipe is a Fulbright and Marshall Fund scholar. Thank you for your energy in planning this forum and for making it such a success. He will be leaving us soon and will be greatly missed.

So, thank you very much to all of our participants and to our audience. I hope you find the forum stimulating and will continue to think about these issues as we plan for the baby boomer retirement.